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Senate

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2002

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I am compelled to rise today in opposition to the amendment offered by the Senator from Kentucky and to join with the Senator from Rhode Island and the Senator from Arizona and others who have spoken eloquently and effectively on this point.

For 23 years of my life, I was not a Senator but was a naval flight officer, and I served as commission commander of Navy aircraft.

We saw a lot in the news earlier this year about this. I have been stationed on bases that did not get much support. As the Senator from Rhode Island suggested, it is not an enviable position to be in--either professionally in terms of supporting your mission, your aircraft, or whatever weapons systems with which you operate. And it is not an especially satisfying position to be in for the families of those who are assigned to those bases because you don't get the kind of support for your child care development centers, and you don't get the kind of support for your family-related activities on those bases.

Several people rose today to say there are cost savings that flow out of base realignment and closures. Just take the figures that were estimated by the previous two speakers: Savings of \$15 billion to \$16 billion by 2001, and annual savings going forward of about \$6 billion per year. Let's say those figures are not right. Let's say they overstate by half the amount of money that

has been saved and will be saved. It was suggested that we have already saved anywhere between \$7.5 billion to \$8 billion, and that going forward we might expect to save another \$3 billion each year.

What would we do with that money? There are plenty of things to spend it on in this Defense authorization bill. I will just mention a few of them: Fighter aircraft that we are anxious to build; military airlift capability; cargo aircraft--either anxious to build or upgrade and improve--helicopters that need to be replaced, and ships.

Earlier we heard from the Senator from Alabama that 315 Navy ships continue to diminish. We need to build ships to replace those that are being decommissioned. We need to build submarines as well.

The President and others support the idea of developing and deploying a national missile defense system which will cost tens of billions of dollars. But even if we set aside those weapons systems and simply consider the aircraft and the ships that stay on the ground, with the helicopters that stay on the ground that are used just for cannibalization--we steal their spare parts to keep other ships and other aircraft and other helicopters flying, the ships that aren't going to sea simply because they lack the spare parts that enable them to carry out their missions.

It has been suggested that in the wake of the tragedies in the last 2 weeks--the terrorist attacks in New York and Virginia--

somehow keeping military bases that are unutilized or underutilized open will enable us to be more vigilant against our enemies. I just do not see it. I just do not see it that way.

The language in the legislation before us today does not mandate the establishment of a base realignment commission. It provides the discretion to the President and to our Secretary of Defense, if they see fit, to appoint the members to serve on a commission. As Senator McCain has suggested, the language in this legislation is crafted in a way to take the politics out of whatever might be done with respect to base realignment.

If the President and if the Secretary of Defense elected to use the discretion provided for them in this legislation, they would ultimately establish the commission, and that commission would ultimately come

back to us in this body and in the House of Representatives in order to have the final say, the final word, as to whether or not the bases recommended for closure be closed. We have the final word.

I believe it is prudent for us, in a day and age when we do have substantial needs for additional weapons systems--upgraded weapons systems, and to make the ones we already have workable--to look for some opportunities to save not just a few dollars but a substantial number of dollars. The potential in this bill, with this approach, is very real.

With that, Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support the language the committee has reported out, and also to support our President and our Secretary of Defense, as well as our military leaders, who have sought just this kind of authorization.